



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Mark R. Warner
Governor

January 20, 2005

Volunteers provide essential services that benefit individuals and communities in every corner of the Commonwealth. Virginians who become involved with Virginia Corps and our Citizen Corps program exemplify the spirit of volunteer and community service and preparedness that these programs encourage and foster. I applaud your concern for others and deeply appreciate your commitment to showing how Virginians can work together to strengthen and improve our communities.

Although the first part of January has been unseasonably warm, the Commonwealth will no doubt face some very cold days in the months ahead. Helping vulnerable citizens prepare for the harsh winter months -- particularly in light of today's energy prices -- should be a high priority for Citizen Corps, Virginia Corps, and for community volunteers across Virginia.

Accordingly, I am encouraging each of you to reach out to those in need this season by joining the many local efforts that are devoted to preparing vulnerable people for winter's severe weather. I hope you will go the extra mile this year to search for new partners and seek innovative ways to ensure that all members of your community are safe during this season. One of the best ways to assist your at-risk neighbors is by helping them winterize their homes.

Find out from your local government who needs help and then pull together a team that can spend the day sealing door and window cracks; insulating water pipes or hot water heaters; or taking other steps to save energy and reduce heating costs. While in these homes, you can also check smoke detectors and teach residents how to safely vent or install alternative heating devices and generators. Visit www.virginiacorps.org for more information about winter safety.

Across Virginia, Citizen Corps groups including Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and Neighborhood Watch Groups are already joining with local businesses to distribute preparedness information and to help winterize homes. Here are some examples of best practices that you might implement in your community:

- Home Depot stores in Alexandria, Chesterfield County, Colonial Heights, Richmond, Roanoke, Virginia Beach and Winchester are joining with Citizen

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Corps members to winterize homes. Several Home Depot stores have agreed to donate the winterization supplies for a number of at-risk homes. Other stores will have their volunteer Team Depot members work on site with local Citizen Corps teams to winterize residences. I encourage you to check with your local hardware store to see if they would like to form a similar partnership;

- In York County, Citizen Corps members in partnership with their Home Depot store spent a day distributing preparedness information and kits;
- Colonial Heights CERT volunteers partnered with the Sears store at their local mall to distribute winter safety information. In Danville, CERT partnered with Lowes to distribute winter preparedness information during the store's October Preparedness Fair;
- Tazewell County Citizen Corps volunteers became partners with county stores as part of their winter preparedness campaign – *"Give the Gift of Safety"*.

Another good way to prepare your community for winter's hazards is to educate those around you. As a volunteer you can distribute preparedness material and speak at local schools, senior centers or civic organization meetings. You can also develop partnerships with your local utility company, law enforcement agency and fire department to help with their important safety education efforts. Developing a partnership with a local media outlet is often the best way to disseminate winter preparedness information to the largest audience.

Other ways that you can help others prepare for the cold days ahead include working with a community kitchen to deliver hot meals, putting together an emergency kit for someone who does not have the means to put one together alone, checking each day on an at-risk neighbor to ensure that person's warmth and safety, and joining with family, friends and neighbors to contribute food items to your local Food Bank. More specific information on winter hazards and prevention is available at – <http://www.vaemergency.com> and. <http://www.vdfp.state.va.us>.

These are just a few of the many ways in which volunteers can make life warmer and safer for all Virginians during these winter months. Please join in these efforts with the many other dedicated volunteers across the Commonwealth who are already lending a helping hand.

Thanks to you, Virginia's communities will be safer, more secure and better prepared this winter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark R. Warner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark R. Warner